

CLAIMS

What is claimed:

1. A method, comprising:
obtaining identity information regarding an entity which enters a controlled space;
and
automatically associating, using a computer system, the identity information with the addition, removal, return, defective, or other movement or status of objects to/from/within the controlled space.
2. The method of claim 1 wherein the entity is identified by a controller associated with the controlled space, the controller being configured to unlock a locking mechanism to allow the entity to have access to the controlled space provided the entity is authorized to do so.
3. The method of claim 1 further comprising notifying a user of the addition, removal, return, defective, or other movement or status of the objects.
4. The method of claim 3 further comprising notifying the user of whether or not the addition, removal, return, defective, or other movement or status of the objects is authorized or not.
5. The method of claim 4 wherein authorization is determined according to the identity information.
6. The method of claim 1 wherein the identity of the entity which enters the controlled space and the addition, removal, return, defective, or other movements or

status of objects to/from/within the controlled space is monitored using a tracking system coupled to the computer system.

7. The method of claim 6 wherein the tracking system includes tags affixed to one or more of the objects and/or the entity, the tags configured to communicate via a wireless link with a monitoring unit.

8. The method of claim 6 wherein the tracking system includes tags affixed to one or more of the objects and/or the entity, the tags configured to be activated through contact with a reader device.

9. The method of claim 6 wherein the tracking system includes barcode labels affixed to one or more of the objects.

10. The method of claim 6 wherein the tracking system includes video cameras monitoring the controlled space.

11. The method of claim 6 wherein the tracking system includes one or more mechanical devices, including at least one device that registers an absence or a weight of an object in a predefined location.

12. The method of claim 6 wherein the addition, removal, return, defective, or other movement or status of the objects to/from/within the controlled space is entered into the computer system by the entity using an input device.

13. The method of claim 1 wherein the association of the addition, removal, return, defective, or other movement or status of the objects to/from/within the controlled space

with the identity information is transmitted to a server computer system through a communication interface coupled to the computer system.

14. The method of claim 13 wherein the communication interface comprises one or more of: a wireless communication link, a network communication link, and a telephone communication link.

15. The method of claim 13 wherein a user accesses information regarding the addition, removal, return, defective, or other movements or status of objects to/from/within the controlled space associated with the identity information in the server computer system through one or more client computers coupled to the server computer system through a network.

16. The method of claim 15 wherein the network comprises the Internet.

17. The method of claim 13 wherein the server automatically notifies a designated person regarding the addition, removal, return, defective, or other movement or status of objects.

18. The method of claim 17 wherein the notification is transmitted to the user via a wireless communication link, a network communication link, and/or a telephone communication link.

19. The method of claim 17 wherein objects are automatically replenished as a result of the notification.

20. The method of claim 17 wherein a party is automatically billed as a result of the notification.

21. The method of claim 17 wherein an object is automatically returned or picked up as a result of the notification.

22. A machine-readable storage medium embodying a sequence of instructions executable by the machine to perform a method for automatically associating an identity of an entity with the movement of one or more objects in a controlled-access location, the method comprising:

identifying, at a controller associated with the controlled-access location, an entity attempting to enter the controlled-access location; and

unlocking a locking mechanism to allow the entity to have access to the controlled-access location provided the entity is authorized to do so, such authorization being determined during or according to the results of the identifying process.

23. The machine-readable storage medium of claim 22 wherein the identity of the entity which enters the controlled-access location and the movement of the objects in the controlled-access location are monitored using a tracking system associated with the controlled-access location.

24. The machine-readable storage medium of claim 22 wherein the tracking system includes tags configured to communicate via a wireless link with a monitoring device.

25. The machine-readable storage medium of claim 22 wherein the tracking system includes tags configured to be activated through contact with a reader device.

26. The machine-readable storage medium of claim 22 wherein the tracking system includes barcode labels which are scanned as the objects are added to or removed from the controlled-access location.

27. The machine-readable storage medium of claim 22 wherein the tracking system includes video cameras monitoring the controlled-access locator.

28. The machine-readable storage medium of claim 22 wherein the tracking system includes one or more mechanical devices, including at least one device that is configured to register an absence or a weight of an object in a predefined location.

29. The machine-readable storage medium of claim 22 wherein the movement of the objects within/to/from the controlled-access location is entered into a computer system by the entity using an input device.

30. The machine-readable storage medium of claim 22 wherein the method further comprises re-locking the locking mechanism, and automatically locking out all other entities until the tracking system has accounted for all remaining objects in the controlled-access location.

31. The machine-readable storage medium of claim 22 wherein the automatic association of the movement of the objects with the identity of the entity is transmitted to a server computer system through one or more of a wireless interface, a network interface, or a telephone interface.

32. The machine-readable storage medium of claim 31 wherein the method further comprises allowing access to information in the server regarding the movement of the objects associated with the identity of the entity through one or more client computers coupled to the server computer system through a network.

33. The machine-readable storage medium of claim 32 wherein the network comprises the Internet.

34. The machine-readable storage medium of claim 31 wherein the server computer system is configured to automatically notify a user via one or more of a wireless interface, a network interface, or a telephone interface regarding an event involving the movement of the objects.

35. The machine-readable storage medium of claim 34 wherein the network interface comprises a dedicated channel and the notification is sent to a pre-existing inventory control system in an organization.

36. The machine-readable storage medium of claim 34 wherein objects are automatically replenished or returned as a result of the notification.

37. The machine-readable storage medium of claim 34 wherein a party is automatically billed as a result of the notification.

38. A computer system, comprising:

a processing unit;

a memory coupled to the processing unit;

a process executed from the memory causing the processing unit to automatically associate an identity of an entity with movement or status changes of objects to/from/within a controlled space.

39. The computer system of claim 38 wherein the process further causes the processing unit to associate the identity of the entity which enters the controlled space

and the movement or status changes of objects to/from/within the controlled space according to information provided by a tracking system coupled to the computer system.

40. The computer system of claim 38 wherein the process further causes the processing unit to associate the identity of the entity with the movement or status changes of objects to/from/within the controlled space according to information which is entered into the computer system by the entity using an input device coupled to the computer system.

41. The computer system of claim 38 wherein the process further causes the processing unit to transmit information regarding the association of the movement or status changes of objects to/from/within controlled space with the identity of the entity to a server computer system coupled to the computer system.

42. The method of claim 13 wherein the server computer system automatically decrements or increments inventory levels or changes the status of objects in response to data transmitted to the server computer system.

43. The method of claim 13 wherein the server computer system automatically correlates the movement or status of objects with the entity responsible for these movements or status updates in response to the data transmitted to the server computer system.

44. The method of claim 17 wherein an access code is automatically generated as a result of the notification.